

Serco Vocational Services

Employer

Inspection dates		9–13 June 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Too few apprentices complete their programmes and those who do often take longer than planned.
- For a few apprentices, particularly those in contact centres, assessors set targets that are too vague.
- Assessors do not give sufficient written feedback to apprentices to help them improve their work.
- Assessors do not routinely correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- There are pockets of weak practice in most subjects.
- Managers do not monitor the progress of apprentices closely enough or take swift and effective action to improve the performance of those apprentices who are making slow progress.
- Managers have not yet fully implemented processes for managing the quality of subcontractors.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Apprentices develop good workplace skills and knowledge.
- Initial assessment is effective in identifying additional learning needs, in placing apprentices on appropriate programmes and helping them to make progress.
- The majority of taught sessions are good.
- Functional skills teaching is good and most learners achieve their qualifications.
- Assessors promote equality and diversity well through induction and reviews.
- Managers monitor closely the performance of individual assessors and take prompt and effective action to remedy underperformance.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate apprentices' progress by working closely with their line managers at work to ensure they better understand the demands of the apprenticeship programme and are more ready to release their apprentices for off-the-job training.
- Improve Serco managers' access to, and understanding of, data and develop their skills in using this data to target areas for improvement and take swift and effective actions to raise standards.
- Improve the quality of target setting to enable all apprentices to make more rapid progress.
- Improve the quality of written feedback, including the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar, so that apprentices understand what they need to do to improve.
- Implement quality-monitoring processes consistently across all subcontracts so that managers can intervene effectively as soon as problems arise.
- Focus quality processes more sharply on the quality of assessor work rather than on their completion of specific tasks. Use the information this provides to develop assessor skills so that apprentices receive a high quality service in all aspects of their programme.
- Increase the extent to which staff share good practice across all subjects so that they improve all aspects of the learner experience.
- Improve the frequency and quality of feedback from subcontractors to enable assessors to improve the quality of apprentices' progress reviews and plan on-the-job training more effectively.
- Strengthen subcontracting agreements so that managers can more effectively hold subcontractors to account.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Too few apprentices successfully completed their apprenticeship in 2012/13. Although many make good progress, too many apprentices on business administration, customer service and contact centre operations programmes remain behind schedule and are unlikely to complete their programmes by the due date. ▪ Apprentices in engineering, sport, leisure and recreation, and custodial care programmes are making good progress. ▪ Assessors do not always enrol business administration apprentices on programmes that are challenging enough for them. A few apprentices undertake intermediate level programmes when their prior achievements and job roles would indicate that they are more suited to advanced level programmes. ▪ In most learning sessions, both on- and off-the-job, apprentices make good progress in developing their work skills. Managers and supervisors help apprentices develop their practical skills. Trainers and assessors help apprentices to gain a sound understanding of the theoretical aspects of their programme and how to apply this knowledge in the workplace. ▪ Apprentices successfully improve their knowledge across a range of subjects important to employment. These include health and safety, safeguarding and their rights and responsibilities as an employee. Mathematics and English skills are generally well developed. ▪ The progress of different groups of apprentices, such as those from different ethnic backgrounds, is broadly similar and there are no discernible achievement gaps. However, those with a learning difficulty or disability are less likely to be successful on advanced level programmes. Managers have recognised this and have introduced more rigorous testing at the 	

start of apprentices' programmes to identify any additional learning needs. Apprentices are encouraged to disclose any learning difficulties they may have, such as dyslexia. As a result, assessors now plan support more effectively. But, although early indications are promising, it is too early to judge the full impact of these actions.

- Many apprentices take on additional responsibilities while following their programme. On completion of their apprenticeship, the majority continue in employment with Serco. A few gain promotion or progress into higher education.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, resulting in good progress in most vocational areas. Assessors are highly qualified and experienced and use their skills well to motivate apprentices and offer them highly effective support. The great majority of assessors encourage apprentices to work independently and to take additional responsibility in the workplace. As a result, apprentices develop their skills rapidly.
- Training sessions, both for individuals and for groups, are good. Assessors carefully match apprentices to opportunities and work closely with both apprentices and their managers to tailor programmes to apprentices' work roles.
- In most cases, assessors provide apprentices with good learning materials and online resources to encourage independent learning. This helps apprentices to develop their understanding. However, a few apprentices in contact centres have limited access to additional resources, which slows progress.
- Most apprentices have high quality workplaces and their managers offer them additional work and encouragement to ensure they complete. For example, in engineering, apprentices are encouraged to gain additional trade skills. However, a few apprentices have less supportive employers who are slowing the pace of progress.
- Assessors check learning well during sessions and through assessment and progress reviews. Apprentices often receive good on-the-job training, which assessors and managers integrate well into the programme. However, in a minority of cases, particularly within business administration, assessors and managers do not coordinate this training well and this slows apprentices' progress.
- Assessors identify apprentices' starting points effectively, link the findings electronically with individual learning plans and identify accurately additional learning support needs. For most apprentices, programmes are challenging, but in one business administration location, apprentices follow programmes that are too easy. As a result, a few learners do not achieve their full potential.
- Apprentices' progress reviews are generally good. Staff use the results of initial assessment well, track apprentices' progress accurately and involve employers in the review process. However, in engineering, feedback from the colleges that teach the technical certificate is not sufficient for reviews to be effective. Target setting through reviews is usually clear and precise but, in a few instances, particularly in contact centre programmes, targets are too general or vague. As a result, a few learners are unsure of what they must do to make rapid progress.
- Assessment practice is generally very good, building on previous work and planning future work well. In business administration, many assessors use holistic observation particularly well. However, engineering assessors plan less well and rely too much on witness testimony.
- Verbal feedback is generally very effective, detailed and constructive. However, written feedback for too many apprentices in public service and engineering is insufficiently frequent and effective. A few assessors do not routinely correct apprentices' English. For example, workbooks are not always marked in a timely fashion in public services.
- Teaching and learning of functional skills are good. Apprentices study functional skills through a very effective online system and a specialist tutor provides good support for learners with specific needs. Assessors offer good support for functional skills, and the higher than national

pass rates reflect this. Engineering apprentices develop particularly high levels of mathematics skills.

- Information, advice and guidance support learning well. Systems for providing these have improved in the past year and are good. Pre-course information is now thorough. The apprentice passport contains comprehensive course information and detailed guides are in place for all aspects of the programmes. The great majority of apprentices have a good understanding of their programmes. Assessors offer good professional advice to apprentices on career progression.
- Assessors develop well apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity through training, reviews and induction. Apprentices generally have a good understanding of their own rights and responsibilities and of wider diversity themes in their own workplaces.

Public services

Good

Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and, consequently, apprentices are making good progress in this recently introduced provision. Apprentices increase their self-confidence and develop very useful skills and knowledge of custodial care.
- Assessors have high expectations of apprentices and use their skills and experience very effectively to motivate them. Assessors make sure all apprentices understand what they expect of them and that they maintain positive attitudes to their learning.
- Assessors plan sessions well, making successful use of a good range of teaching and assessment methods to meet the needs of each apprentice. They use well-prepared simulations of cell searching, handcuffing and roll checks to develop skills and check understanding. However, apprentices' line managers are not always able to release staff for planned activities because of the operational demands of the prison regime. This causes a few apprentices to miss targets for completing work.
- Assessors monitor the progress made by apprentices very effectively. Apprentices and their line managers have a good understanding of the level of progress made and know what to do next to ensure work is completed. Progress reviews are frequent, thorough and effective. Assessors identify quickly those apprentices at risk of not hitting their learning targets and they provide additional support that is successful in helping them to remain on track.
- Assessors provide good support within learning sessions for the development of English, mathematics, and information and communication technology skills. Apprentices' written work is usually of a high standard, but assessors do not provide written feedback to help apprentices understand how to improve their work further. They do not routinely mark work for spelling, punctuation and grammar and, consequently, apprentices do not improve their writing skills as much as they might.
- Assessors make good use of a range of tools to establish apprentices' starting points. They use well the results of assessments to identify any extra help that apprentices need and to help set learning goals. This ensures that apprentices make good progress. Assessors provide the few apprentices who have dyslexia with effective additional support.
- Assessors provide high quality information, advice and guidance, both before and during programmes. The induction process is effective in ensuring that apprentices are aware of the commitment they need in order to complete their studies successfully. Towards the end of programmes, assessors make sure that they provide high quality guidance to help prepare apprentices for the next stage in their learning or for promotion at work.
- At HMP Ashfield, resources to support learning are good. All apprentices make good use of high quality workbooks. Apprentices make good use of a well-equipped training room and the assessor and internal quality assurer are available to apprentices in need of extra help.

- Assessors provide additional workshops to ensure all current apprentices based at HMP Ashfield complete their work on time, and an electronic portfolio helps them keep track of their progress. However, for the small minority of apprentices based at other locations, such as courts and vehicle escort bases, access to resources is limited, hampering progress.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Apprentices develop a greater understanding of different faiths and cultures. For example, they adopt a sensitive approach to searching prisoners' religious artefacts such as scriptures and prayer mats. Assessors ensure apprentices work consistently to demonstrate fairness and understanding in their work with prisoners, which develops a safer environment for all. Assessors set high standards for the welfare and safety of prisoners. Apprentices develop a good awareness of how to safeguard themselves and each other.

Engineering

Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this reflects the number of apprentices who complete their frameworks within the agreed timescale, the rate at which they develop practical skills and the standard of work produced. All current apprentices are making good progress and are due to complete ahead of time. Following completion, apprentices progress into higher education or into jobs within the Ministry of Defence or with manufacturers. Previous apprentices have moved quickly into supervisory posts.
- Workplace supervisors and assessors are highly committed to the programme and have high expectations of apprentices. Apprentices work successfully on complex aeronautical, electronic, and machining and maintenance tasks, many of which are safety critical and highly regulated. As a result, apprentices rapidly develop very high levels of practical skill and technical knowledge. Most apprentices communicate with ministry officers, government officials and workshop managers on a frequent basis and, consequently, they develop very strong communication and customer care skills.
- Assessors plan training with care. On all sites, managers and trainers deliver high-quality theoretical and practical training. Supervisors rotate apprentices between hangars and workshops to ensure they have a variety of interesting and challenging tasks that help them to progress quickly towards achievement of their qualifications.
- Apprentices attend blocks of learning at colleges in their region to complete their technical certificates and the quality of this training is high. However, these colleges do not routinely report absence, timekeeping or progress information to inform supervisors of training and knowledge gaps. Because of this, the coordination of college work with on-the-job training is insufficient, and this affects the progress of a small minority of apprentices.
- In the past, assessors have not tracked the progress of apprentices with enough rigour. Although a few apprentices developed their own tracking and monitoring records, they had few milestones against which they could judge their own progress. An internal quality assurer has introduced detailed plans to improve this practice but it is too soon to judge the impact of these changes.
- Targets agreed during progress reviews are insufficiently specific and do not fully inform apprentices and supervisors of what is required to improve performance quickly. Supervisors attend progress reviews and are actively involved in discussions on progress and skill development. However, apprentices and supervisors do not always receive copies of reviews, or written assignment feedback, and rely too heavily on verbal feedback that few remember.
- Assessors help apprentices develop English and mathematics skills throughout their programme. Apprentices' engineering reports, assignments and portfolios are well referenced and presented. Assessors have provided templates that have helped to develop succinct writing skills. A third of

apprentices have made better than anticipated progress in mathematics, achieving high grades and completing qualifications higher than their framework demands.

- Recruitment and selection processes are thorough and assessors provide promptly and effectively any extra help that apprentices need. Assessors issue booklets at the start of the apprentices' programme and use these effectively to reinforce key aspects such as health and safety, safeguarding and employment rights and responsibilities throughout the programme. Information, advice and guidance are particularly good as apprentices approach the end of their programme and are considering employment and higher education opportunities.
- Assessors and supervisors know their apprentices well and work hard to ensure they all reach their full potential. Assessors strongly reinforce equality, diversity and safeguarding themes through progress reviews. Apprentices routinely work with differing teams and cultures and communicate with engineers and managers at all levels. Apprentices have a good understanding of health and safety and the need for high security on military bases.

Sport, leisure and recreation

Good

Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and, as a result, apprentices make good progress in this recently introduced subject area. Apprentices develop their knowledge, understanding, skills and team working abilities effectively.
- Staff have high expectations of apprentices and this inspires them to do well. Assessors are enthusiastic, well motivated, demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting apprentices' achievement and are readily available to provide extra help when this is required. They provide high levels of care and individual guidance that help apprentices to progress quickly.
- Assessors lead well-planned sessions, which are interesting, interactive and vibrant. Practical sessions help apprentices to develop their skills and put theory into practice. Apprentices successfully develop their coaching skills because of these sessions. In many cases, other apprentices act as clients during these activities, providing well-considered and helpful feedback that helps apprentices progress well.
- Apprentices develop a good understanding of health, safety and welfare issues and appreciate the importance of healthy eating and maintaining healthy lifestyles.
- Assessors use a range of assessment techniques to establish apprentices' prior knowledge and to enrol them on appropriate programmes. They use the result of initial diagnostic assessments to plan the additional help that some apprentices need to complete their apprenticeship. As a result, the vast majority of apprentices have remained on their programme and are on track to complete successfully.
- Apprentices and assessors complete thorough individual learning plans at the start of each programme. They record these electronically and assessors use well the information they contain to provide training and support that meet the specific requirements of each apprentice.
- Assessors conduct frequent and very effective progress reviews and set clear and appropriate learning targets. Apprentices understand how to improve as a result of these reviews. Assessors use an electronic portfolio to track progress and apprentices can check their progress online, which motivates them to work hard.
- Assessors support apprentices well in learning sessions to develop their vocabulary. They provide explanations of a range of terms in health and fitness lessons and, in other sessions, make clear and accurate reference to anatomical and physiological terms. However, assessors do not integrate the development of mathematics skills as successfully.
- Assessors provide good information, advice and guidance throughout each apprentice's programme and this helps apprentices to meet their learning goals and to explore possible progression routes. Induction is highly effective. Assessors use course booklets well to provide clear guidance on the demands of each programme. During progress reviews, assessors

frequently lead good discussions on an individual's personal aspirations, providing useful information and advice on further learning and job opportunities.

- Assessors do not promote equality and diversity themes sufficiently. Assessors reinforce apprentices' understanding during their training by discussing relevant news items during progress reviews. However, they do not help apprentices to develop their awareness of the diverse needs of their clients when working with them on fitness programmes.

Administration

Requires improvement

Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment in business administration require improvement and this reflects the low proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their programme. Although managers and assessors have made improvements to teaching and learning, these changes have not yet had the full impact on apprentice outcomes, particularly for contact centre apprentices.
- Apprentices receive insufficient support. Many business administration apprentices have had delays in their programme while waiting for the allocation of an assessor. However, once allocated, assessors review progress methodically.
- Assessors coach their apprentices individually and devise challenging tasks for them to practise independently. In most cases, employers provide high-quality on-the-job training, resulting in good progress of their apprentices. However, too many employers are not sufficiently involved in planning or reviewing learning and this hampers progress.
- Most assessors have high aspirations for their apprentices. They have appropriate experience and qualifications and use these well to plan individual learning sessions. For example, one assessor used probing questions to extend the apprentice's understanding of the importance of security in a bank fraud department. Only a minority of assessors use the outcomes of early assessments to develop short-term targets for individual apprentices that help them to improve their weak areas. Too many assessors set unchallenging targets so that apprentices do not sufficiently extend their knowledge or make progress in line with their ability.
- Assessment planning is clear and task based, so that most apprentices know exactly what they need to do. Business administration and customer service apprentices have good opportunities to demonstrate their skills during observed assessment. Contact centre operations apprentices have less access to a wide range of assessment methods and often make slower progress because of this.
- Assessors provide clear and objective feedback. Apprentices know what they have to do to make progress on their learning programmes. However, too many apprentices rely too much on assessors, do not understand sufficiently the structure of the qualification and do not develop independent learning skills. Insufficient learning resources are available and, consequently, there are a few occasions when apprentices fail to extend their knowledge beyond their immediate job role.
- In most cases, assessors provide good support that helps apprentices develop their mathematics and English skills. Apprentices enjoy their functional skills learning sessions, even when finding topics challenging. In some cases, apprentices are keen to develop these skills on their own. For example, one apprentice has been inspired to work independently through a grammar and punctuation book recommended by her manager.
- A few apprentices require much more English and mathematics support than was identified at the start of their programme and these apprentices are at risk of not completing their apprenticeship. Their managers are unable to release them to attend learning sessions and they make little progress.

- Apprentices receive adequate information, advice and guidance throughout their programme and in most cases, this supports their progress. Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety and demonstrate safe working practices.
- The promotion of equality and diversity themes is good. Apprentices broaden their understanding of gender, ethnic, cultural and religious differences and awareness of disability and how this impacts on work during discussion with their assessors at progress reviews. For example, apprentices can define discrimination clearly and describe how it applies in their workplace.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior managers of Serco have made a significant commitment to developing their staff through apprenticeship programmes. As a result, a large number of Serco employees have embarked upon apprenticeships. Managers review vacant positions to establish whether they are suitable for an apprentice and, as a result, an increasing number of new recruits are apprentices.
- Managers have set over-ambitious targets for the recruitment of apprentices and unrealistic deadlines for apprentices to complete their programmes. In too many cases, this has led to apprentices failing to complete their programme within the agreed timescale. More recent recruits have been given more realistic targets.
- Managers have recognised the need to improve the quality of programmes. Recent changes to the management team have given it the necessary structure and roles to deliver the required improvements. New quality processes are clear and address a full range of quality assurance and improvement concerns. However, many of the changes are recent and it is too early to judge the full extent of their impact.
- Managers now monitor the performance of assessors closely. They use monthly file audits, assessor reviews and a new lesson observation scheme to identify weaknesses and to set appropriate targets for improvement. However, the focus of too much of this work is on compliance and not enough on improvements, such as to the quality of apprenticeship reviews.
- There are clear performance management processes and these are used swiftly and effectively to tackle underperformance. This is leading to improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers do not monitor closely enough information about the performance of current apprentices. As a result, they are not able to identify and solve emerging areas of concern quickly or accurately. The reporting of performance information to senior Serco executives lacks the detail required to allow them to support and challenge managers effectively.
- The management of subcontractors requires improvement. There are appropriate procedures to verify the suitability of new subcontractors. However, managers have only recently developed processes to monitor apprentice progress at subcontractors and have not yet fully implemented them. Actions to verify the data provided by subcontractors are at an early stage of development.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and identifies those areas that require improvement. Recent changes to the self-assessment process have allowed all staff to contribute to the report. The quality improvement plan contains a range of appropriate actions and subject teams and managers monitor progress on a monthly basis. For a few actions, progress is insufficient.
- Until the current academic year, managers did not match the commitment to provide apprenticeships to all employees who wished to undertake one with appropriate planning or resourcing. As a result, assessors were not available to a significant number of apprentices at the start of their programme and this has hindered their progress. Although this has now been resolved, a number of apprentices have not yet caught up.

- Serco meets its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding apprentices. All staff are trained and understand their duties. Managers have responded to the findings of the last inspection by training a number of individuals to act as regional safeguarding officers.
- Apprentices are fully aware of health and safety, safeguarding and equality and diversity matters. Assessors cover these subjects in detail during induction and the recent introduction of an assessor newsletter is helping assessors to lead useful discussions on all these subjects during progress review meetings. There have not been any recent examples of bullying, harassment or safeguarding concerns.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Serco Vocational Services

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
Outcomes for learners	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Public services	2
Engineering	2
Sport, leisure and recreation	2
Administration	3

Type of provider	Employer								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1240								
Principal/CEO	Angela Kokes								
Date of previous inspection	28 January – 1 February 2013								
Website address	www.sercovocational.com								
Provider information at the time of the inspection									
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	60	807	57	595	-	-			
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	-		-		-				
Number of learners aged 14-16	-								
Full-time	-								
Part-time	-								
Number of community learners	-								
Number of employability learners	-								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Crime Scene Resources Limited ■ Eden College of Human resource Development and Management Studies Limited ■ Fusion People Training Limited ■ JT Development Solutions Limited ■ Liral Veget Training and Recruitment Limited ■ Morgan Daniels Training Limited ■ Step Up Training Associates Limited 								

Contextual information

Serco is a large national company providing government services in a wide range of industries including health, education, transport, immigration services, science, leisure, defence and custodial care. Serco Vocational Services manages and delivers the apprenticeship programme across the country from its sites in Gloucester, Taunton and Farnborough. It also manages and supports the delivery of apprenticeships for non-Serco employees through a range of subcontractors.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Russell Henry HMI
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One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the UK Apprenticeship Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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